

FITNESS TO STUDY POLICY & PROCEDURES 2020

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Reviewed:
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A FUTURE LESS ORDINARY

1. Introduction

Bilborough 6th Form College is an educational institution for full time students. We are committed to tailoring our education to individual needs and promoting inclusivity and equality of opportunity. This philosophy underpins the way in which we constantly strive to make reasonable adjustments for any student. In doing so we fully comply with the Equality Act 2010.

It is important, however, to be clear about what is reasonable in an educational setting and the limits to the individual support that can be provided within a sixth form college.

Our staff provide outstanding care for all students, but there will be times when a student's physical or mental health are so affected that they are no longer able, despite the support provided both within the College and externally, to maintain reasonable academic progress:

- We are not a distance-learning College and, while it is reasonable for subject teachers and support staff to be flexible on a temporary basis, prolonged periods of absence are not sustainable, particularly as students are being prepared for demanding external accreditation;
- There may be times when the nature of a student's ill health can require support beyond the expertise or capacity that we can reasonably offer;
- Occasionally a student's ill health may present a health and safety risk to either themselves or those around them that is unmanageable in a mainstream educational setting.

There are therefore occasions where, for one or more of the reasons above, it will be our judgement that, in the best interests of a student, continuing at College is no longer the best option.

2. Aims

These procedures aim to provide:

- A framework to guide decision making in complex student welfare cases;
- A set of parameters for the minimum acceptable level of academic progress;
- A series of stages for reviewing a student's place at the College;
- A list of minimum expectations of students who are offered the opportunity to restart at the College.

They have been developed to work in conjunction with other key College procedures and policies:

- Safeguarding Policies and Procedures;
- Equality and Diversity Policy;
- Health and Wellbeing Department Confidentiality Policy.

3. Joining the College

Students are encouraged to disclose any physical or mental health need as part of their application. This disclosure will in no way prejudice any decision about the application – on the contrary, it is used to establish how best we can respond to the individual need and what reasonable adjustments can be made. In cases where a

complex or significant physical or mental health condition is disclosed, it may be appropriate that further information is sought from health professionals currently supporting the student or from the previous school to be able to formulate a support plan. In addition, a transition meeting may be called to discuss and agree details of the support plan, the appropriate programme to be studied and any reasonable adjustments that we will commit to making. In these cases, the support plan will require formal medical paperwork to be provided and students will be allocated a member of the student services team (Director of Student Support Services, Student Support Manager, Wellbeing Coach, Welfare Officer or Learning Support contact) as well as a Personal Tutor to oversee their progress and support plan.

Any student who joins the College with a support plan will have this reviewed on a half termly basis by a member of this team and consent will be sought to share with subject teachers, and the Personal Tutor, the key relevant information so that they can best make adjustments. **Without this consent, we are unable to commit to providing reasonable adjustments in all aspects of College activities.**

4. Studying at the College

If a student does not disclose a pre-existing physical or mental health condition on application, then it is unlikely that they will receive support or reasonable adjustment until the condition becomes clear to a member of staff. Early disclosure of issues is therefore vital to allow us to assess how best to accommodate students and also to avoid exacerbating the issue through a lack of knowledge on the part of their subject teachers, Welfare staff and Personal Tutor.

We will of course always seek to provide appropriate support to any student with ill health, whether the condition was pre-existing or commences during study at the College. Students are made aware of the extensive range of student services at the College both at induction and as part of the ongoing Tutorial Programme. All staff at the College have a duty of care to students and can be approached with any concern, however small. The main staff who would be consulted by students are:

- Director of Student Support Services
- Student Support Manager
- Lead Personal Tutor
- Welfare Officer
- Well Being Coach
- College Counsellors
- Learning Support team
- Personal Tutor
- Subject Teacher or Curriculum Leader
- Exams officer

The member of staff consulted will seek consent from the student to share with subject teachers and the tutor the key relevant information (via the S form) so that they can best make adjustments. In exceptional circumstances confidentiality may need to be broken without the student's consent. In these circumstances the student will always be informed. If the nature of the medical condition requires support or reasonable adjustment needs to be made to a student's studies, then the Lead Personal Tutor or the Student Support Manager will be asked to meet with and assess the student. This may lead to a support plan being agreed and other staff in the College, becoming involved in providing support. Consent will always be sought

from the student to involve parents and carers in these decisions, however in certain extreme cases confidentiality will need to be respected if the student requests it.

If a student discloses a health or support issue but refuses to consent to the sharing of this information with relevant staff then the college will be unable to put in place appropriate support measures and resulting issues of non-compliance in terms of homework, coursework and attendance will be dealt with via the normal college disciplinary process.

The support plan may also involve referral to outside agencies, such as CAMHS or the student's GP. This is particularly true where the health condition causes significant concern, since the expertise and capacity of the College in providing medical support is finite and the responsibility for medical support lies with the external services. In crisis situations, where there are immediate and grave concerns for a student's health or well-being, student services staff will judge how best to provide first aid and whether emergency services should be called. We will always endeavour, in these situations, to contact parents and carers as soon as possible.

5. Limits to support

Whether medical conditions are raised before a student joins the College or whilst at College, there need to be reasonable limits set to the support that can be offered. These include both the flexibility the College should show around academic progress (attendance and meeting assessment expectations) and the support (type, location and frequency) that is needed for a student to remain at College.

Clearly it is difficult to set non-negotiable limits for academic progression and support and there needs to be judicious professional judgement in each case. Furthermore, physical and mental health conditions may be temporary or permanent, short or long-term, stable or prone to remission. As a guide therefore, the following minimum expectations should be set:

a. Academic progress

Each case needs to be considered on its merits, but it is clear that a minimum level of attendance needs to be maintained that will allow a student to realistically achieve. Academic success depends on engagement in classroom activity, so excessively long periods of complete absence or very poor attendance will make a student's studies untenable. With regards to coursework and homework, if students fall significantly behind with their deadlines, despite extensions being offered, then there comes a point at which catching up is not viable. The specific expectations regarding attendance and assessment will be set in each case depending on the circumstances.

b. Support

It is reasonable for teaching staff, on a short-term temporary basis, to liaise with students via email and Moodle. This cannot continue long-term. We are not a Distance-learning College and do not have the resources, expertise or remit to be one. In terms of pastoral support, the College enjoys a privileged position –The Director of Student Services, Student Support Manager, Well Being Coach, Welfare Officer, the Counselling Team, Personal Tutors and Lead Personal Tutors can all provide appropriate support within certain parameters. We will, where appropriate,

refer to external services and maintain liaison with them. We cannot provide, however, complex medical or psychiatric support. This would be usually sought externally through the GP or other services. Finally, pastoral support is finite and needs to be available for other students as well. In all cases the support we offer must be on site and available to all students.

6. Fitness to Study

Our default position, as a College, is that we want all students to complete their studies successfully and achieve their potential. There are occasions, however, when physical or mental health issues are so complex or so significant that this is not possible. Clearly each student needs to be considered on a case by case basis and the College needs to ensure it is fully aware of all the medical evidence and the wishes of the student and the parents or carers. Ideally, a clear consensus would always emerge about the best way forwards, but this will not always be the case. There will be occasions where the College believes that it has exhausted the support options available, it has made reasonable adjustments in all aspects of College life, but the student is unable to maintain their fitness to study. These situations impact negatively both on the student, since their welfare is at risk, and on the College, since there is an excessive demand on resources. For the student, who has struggled to maintain their academic progress against the odds and for whom trying to keep the structure of College life going has been so far a positive factor in their rehabilitation, there comes a tipping point at which trying to catch up after a lengthy absence with deadlines long gone is actually more stressful and therefore more of a negative impact on their health than withdrawing from studies. The time required to work with individual students to catch up on missed work, liaising remotely via email and Moodle for absent students and arranging meetings and support for students is a finite resource and cannot unreasonably impact on the learning of other students at the College. If the College reaches a decision, after consultation with the student, parents / guardians and medical professionals, that a student should withdraw then this will be actioned. In these situations, we would always assure students and their parents or carers that the best interests of the individual student and their welfare are at the centre of decisions. Where there is no consensus that withdrawal is the most appropriate outcome, then the stages below will be followed:

Level 1 tutor Intervention Health and welfare. Tutor meets with the student to put together a Health Study Support plan. Parents/guardians are notified. Info of support plan is sent home outlining what was discussed in the meeting, concerns and targets. The situation is reviewed 2 weeks later;

Level 2 Student Support manager intervention Health and welfare. Student support manager meets with the student and parent/ guardian to review initial support plan and include new interventions if the current ones are not meeting the student's needs. Info of support plan is sent home outlining what was discussed in the meeting, concerns and targets. The situation is reviewed 2 weeks later;

Level 3 Senior Leadership intervention Health and welfare. A case conference reviews the situation and provides guidance to the Director of Student Support Services, who will adjudicate on the feasibility of the students continued place at college. The student will then be notified of the decision.

NB. It is crucial to recognise that, on occasions, the College is advised, by medical specialists, that it is unsafe for students to attend. This advice will always supersede

College policy and the student will not be able to attend until we are notified of their fitness to do so by the relevant authority.